Kids!

If we cannot interest with our treasures those carefree young persons whose minds are at the height of receptivity, how can we hope to interest those adults who are inevitably fogged and beset by the personal and social worries of an uneasy world? Freeman Tilden

Kids!

What is it? interpretation designed to address specific needs of kids

Why do we do it? children's programs require a special approach

How do we do it? implement skills, techniques, and strategies specifically designed for kids' programs

> ***Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.*** Freeman Tilden

Authors' note

Children possess a playful sense of wonder. Throughout this module, we'll interchangeably refer to children as "kids" not to minimize their status, but to recognize and celebrate their exuberant curiosity.

Introduction

Conducting interpretation for kids is one of the most rewarding aspects of interpretation. There are numerous types of children's programs, and they occur in many venues. Interpreters take their programs into the classroom, bring classroom groups into the park, work with children as members of a general park audience, and create programs specifically for them. Regardless of where or when, there are certain techniques, skills, and opportunities that increase the effectiveness of conducting interpretation with and for kids.

In this module, we will discuss why you should develop interpretation especially for kids, review the various types of programs, and examine how to focus messages for kids. We will also discover ways to involve and address children in a mixed-age audience. We will learn techniques and strategies for working with various age groups, as well as the benefits of conducting specific programs for children. Using a few tips and techniques when delivering kids' programs ensures success.

Purpose and values

> ***Children are the future, and without children rooted in the earth, there can be no future.*** Tom Brown Jr.

Youth is one of the most important populations to target. Not only may you make a significant difference in the future of our parks, but through kids, adults can be influenced as well. It is through the eyes of children that adults often see the clearest vision of their own world. In this age of video games, computers, and virtual reality, it is especially important to help connect kids to the natural and cultural world. Interpretation can definitely do that!

Children often lack a connection with nature, and as Beck and Cable (2002) suggest, many children only experience nature on television. Although it may be good that they watch the *Discovery Channel* as opposed to sitcoms or cartoons, the manner in which kids are "learning" about nature and history may indeed be the very thing that keeps them from experiencing it. For example, if a child learns about nature in a neatly packaged, one-hour show filled with the action and excitement of a lion killing a pronghorn, how can the slow, deliberate, often hidden, real-time of nature capture and hold their attention? Much the same can be said about history. For example, gun-shooting westerns do not accurately reflect pioneer times. Is television better than no exposure…or does it prevent real exposure? This, as Beck and Cable point out, is the irony of educational nature television. One of the values of children's interpretation is it makes the learning and discovery of natural and cultural resources enjoyable and interesting. Interpretation helps kids make the connection.

When children do not connect with nature, it can become a fearful place (Beck and Cable, 2002; Brown, 1989). Spiders, snakes, and bees frighten not only kids, but adults as well. Children, however, because their exposure to nature has come through television, also fear animals that are not even in their local parks, such as elephants and tigers. Remembering Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Module 3-Communication), if a child is afraid, then learning, discovery, or enjoyment is difficult at best. Interpretation, appropriately conducted, should always address the basic needs first, thus alleviating fears.

Introducing nature and history to kids through our interpretive efforts may be their first authentic exposure and, as such, can have a life-altering effect on them. Many of us as children were so moved by natural and/or cultural experiences that we chose interpretation as our careers. Our childhood experiences affect us forever. That is why, as an interpreter, you should always proceed as if each program you create and deliver may change lives. You may never know the impact you and your program have on a child. Therefore, it is with respect and honor that we provide programs for children. Other values of children's programs will be discussed throughout this module as we review the specific program types.

Types of programs

There are many types of programs that can be conducted with children. As with all interpretation, you can conduct talks, walks, campfires, and other types of programs with any audience, kids included. In addition, there are specific programs that are particularly effective with children. The classifications primarily relate to where and how the programs are conducted and the structure of the audience. Although there are other venues, and a good interpreter is always looking for opportunities, the most common children's programs are presented in the park or in the classroom. Park programs include children as members of a mixed-age audience or in programs specifically designed for them. Another venue for reaching children is to take our park programs to the schools. Let us briefly review each type of children's program.

Traditional


The best program will engage all ages.

One of the most common settings in which children connect with the park is through traditional park programs. Families frequently attend interpretive programs, yet a child's special needs in this setting are often overlooked and ignored. Because programs for children should follow a "fundamentally different approach" than programs for adults, interpreters often feel they must address either the adults' or the children's need– not both. In fact, the best programs engage *all* ages. As with any interpretive opportunity, the key is to incorporate as many components of learning, experience, senses, etc., as possible. While children may enjoy stories and pictures, adults may want facts and information. Facts, stories, hands-on opportunities, sensory involvement, analogies, metaphors, pictures, and direct experiences with natural and cultural resources are all components of a successful program designed to meet the needs of individuals at different stages in their lives (Module 3-Communication).

In addition, all adults, not just the parents or guardians, typically appreciate what you do for children. Kids in an audience often create opportunities for adults to be children again. Society usually tempers this desire with regimented restrictions, but interpretive programs can offer an "approved" setting where adults can play. When conducting programs for a mixed-age audience, provide opportunities to touch, explore, interact, and imagine, without minimizing the informational components. Let the guidelines outlined in this module assist you in planning appropriate activities for children in a mixed-age audience. Moderation, balance, and awareness of your audience are the keys for successfully including everyone.

Special

Junior Ranger, Junior Lifeguard, Junior Ranger Adventure Guide, Environmental Studies and Environmental Living Programs, and Litter-Getters are park programs offered on a statewide basis especially for children. These programs reach thousands annually. It is the individual interpreter, working within consistent guidelines, who makes these programs successful.

Junior Ranger activities began in California State Parks in the early 1970s. "Where properly organized and enthusiastically carried out, the Junior Ranger Program has become one of the most important and successful elements of state park interpretation" (Department of Parks and Recreation, 1998, p. 9). Children ages 7-12 can participate in these structured formal programs or self-guided activities, earning a variety of awards that signify completion of different goals and levels. Parks often provide other opportunities, such as Young Naturalists or Cubs, specifically for children under the age of seven. These programs are developed and provided based on individual park needs, goals, and expertise. Although encouraged, they are not a formal statewide program, and offerings vary considerably from park to park.

Children are the target audience and drive the selection of materials, activities, and topics. The goals of the Junior Ranger Program are to offer programming specifically designed for children that "develop(s) in children an appreciation for their cultural and natural resources heritage, an awareness of interrelationship among those resources, and a desire to help protect them" (Department of Parks and Recreation, 1998, p. 10). California State Parks developed a *Junior Ranger Handbook* (1998) that directs the preparation and delivery of Junior Ranger programs. The handbook contains guidelines for working with kids, sample programs, activities, subject information, resources, and self-guided activities. The Junior Ranger Adventure Guide is a new program element that allows more parks to be part of the statewide program. The self-guided workbook may be obtained in a park or downloaded from the Internet. It invites children to participate in park activities and complete puzzles and games about the park. After completing the activities, participants show the guide to park staff and receive an award. The activities are designed to be especially useful in state recreation areas and state historic parks. Check with your supervisor, District Interpretive Specialist, and the CSP Web site for more information.

Junior Lifeguard programs are presented to children approximately 9-15 years of age. They focus specifically on water safety and aquatic natural history. Aquatic recreation, exercise, competition, lifeguard skills and basic First Aid and CPR are introduced. Junior Lifeguard programs involve more contact time with children than do Junior Ranger programs. Junior Lifeguard programs are generally four-week summer programs and average 100 hours of contact time per child. This long-term extended relationship allows the programs to have many of the elements of environmental education as well as interpretation. Ideas and lessons are cumulative and allow for a more in-depth examination of topics. Programs culminate in a formal graduation ceremony to celebrate the child's achievements. The Aquatic Operations Handbook provides an overview of the Junior Lifeguard Program. Contact your supervisor or District Interpretive Specialist to learn more.

Environmental Studies and Environmental Living programs offer school children an opportunity to

explore the interaction between people and their environment. The programs include demonstrations, hands-on activities, and follow-up assignments. Students learn about the lifestyles of the culture or era being studied. Environmental Living programs include an overnight stay in the park.

The statewide Litter-Getter Program involves all ages in activities such as collecting trash, recycling, and learning to be environmentally responsible while in the park. Litter bags, latex gloves, and awards are available to support this program.

School groups

Interpretive programs for kids are also conducted with organized groups of school children. In 2002, California State Parks had over 15,000 schools visit our parks. These programs are conducted both in and out of the classroom. "As field trip destinations, California's state parks are invaluable to schools interested in getting students out of the classroom and into the world beyond the school boundaries" (State Park Plan, California State Parks, 2002, p. 3). Programs conducted with school groups follow a somewhat different approach than those conducted with children that are not part of school groups. For example, in the school-group setting, teachers will often handle behavioral problems that the interpreter may need to address in non-school group situations. If school group programs are conducted in the classroom, the lack of distractions from a park setting can be beneficial. However, it is difficult for kids to experience nature and history in the classroom. One of the primary differences between school group programs and other children's programs is that program content should not only be driven by the park's significance and messages but also by mandated curriculum standards.


Bring school groups to the parks.

All programs conducted for school groups within California State Parks must be aligned with academic content standards. These content standards direct what each student must learn in each grade within California schools. Schools are held accountable to these content standards for each framework, or subject area, through the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. This act created the Academic Performance Index (API), which grades schools on how well students perform on standardized tests. Schools are also held accountable through financial rewards or sanctions directly correlated with the API. Since accountability is based on the academic content standards, creating interpretive opportunities that incorporate these content standards increases the overall benefit for the students, schools, teachers, and the park. Programs should get students into natural and cultural settings, provide opportunities for them to learn about and experience science and history firsthand, and help meet content standards. By meeting these needs, continued support from our public schools is assured. More importantly, we are reaching our target audience.

Although standards help us identify and support appropriate concepts, themes should not be based solely on content standards. They should be chosen based on the same reasons all themes are selected–

park significance, goals and objectives, etc. Content standards are not the point of our program, but they should be used to help us make the point. Standards are available from the California State Parks Website, the Department of Education Website, the District Interpretive Coordinator, and a Compact Disc (CD) produced in 2002 by California State Parks, *Integrating Academic Content Standards into School Group Interpretive Programs.* This CD is also useful for reviewing how to successfully integrate content standards into school-based interpretive programs.

Remember–conducting a school group program is no different from conducting any interpretive program. It is based, in part, on the needs and wants of the target audience. Programs should be developed based on our themes, the content standards, teacher input, the park unit, the target audience, time available for the program, and the number of students and assistants.

School group interpretive programs, although sometimes challenging, help California State Parks reach populations that may not otherwise be reached. Interpretive programs conducted with school groups can help address some of the problems parks will face in the future if children are disconnected from natural and cultural areas. In addition, reaching children through school-based programs helps integrate the park and resources into school curriculum, benefiting the whole community. Making park-resource-based education important and an integral part of the formal educational system is a worthy goal. In fact, the basic theories and approaches of interpretation that make learning exciting, interesting, and fun help to create lifelong learners and park stewards.


Integrating parks into school programs.

The specific type of program you conduct with kids is based on several factors: the venue for the program, the makeup and structure of the audience, the time you have to conduct the program, the goal, and how much adult assistance is available. Now that you understand the general types of kids' programs we offer, let us review the basic characteristics of children relevant to conducting successful interpretive programs.

Interest makes play of the hardest work. Enos Mills

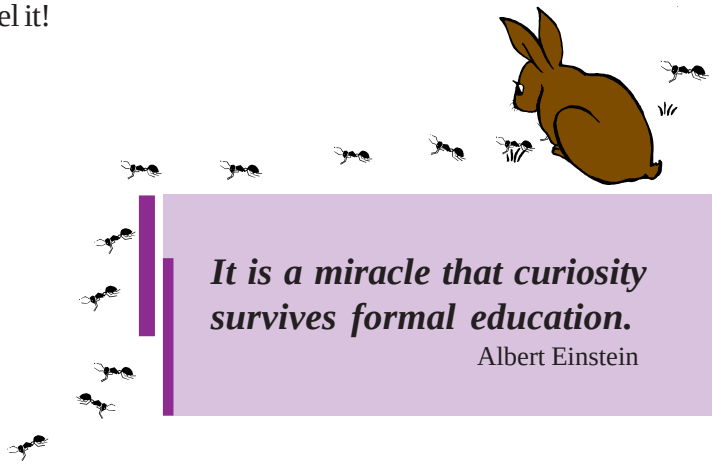
Characteristics

The word "children" is a broad term describing a wide variety of individuals. It goes without saying that a program for third graders would not work well for eighth graders. These distinctions between various ages of children will be made later in the module. Before differences in age are discussed, it is important to realize that although each child is unique and individual, some characteristics are commonly recognized in all kids.

Curiosity

What's that? Where does it come from? Why is the sky blue? Anyone who has ever been around children for any length of time can attest to the fact that they are naturally curious. In fact, "the earliest school years find children learning the names of things at a phenomenal rate, never again matched" (Tilden, 1977, p. 49). Adults are curious too, but are often trained by the conventions of society not to ask too many questions. The very things about children that can drive parents crazy, such as the constant questions, are the same characteristics that will be of the greatest value when conducting programs. For example, when conducting a program for kids, constant questions and interruptions may plague your program. This can be very frustrating…***OR***…you can take advantage of this natural curiosity, energy, and excitement, and channel it!

Channeling natural curiosity.



It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.
Albert Einstein

Channel Kids! curiosity

- **Entertain questions and comments in a controlled, timely fashion.** For example, at the start of the program establish the times and places for stories, comments, and questions. Save comments and stories for the end, but take questions throughout the talk. You may need to explain the difference between comments and questions.
- **Listen!** Children respond well if they know you are listening.
- **Capitalize on kids' natural desire to learn.** Ask questions, and engage them in the resource.
- **Follow their eyes.** Find out what interests them.

Another characteristic very pronounced in younger children, partly because of their lack of inhibitions,…is the love of personal examination through (the) senses other than sight and hearing.

Freeman Tilden

Sensory bound

The natural curiosity of children allows you to get them to do, feel, smell, and otherwise experience nature in ways that adults might not. When a very young child picks up something new, his/her first reaction is to stick it in his mouth. At a young age, the primary method of determining if something is good or bad is based on whether or not it is edible. As a child ages, the tendency to identify objects with the mouth lessens, and the desire to touch increases. Adults become accustomed to not touching things, especially if they do not know what it is. Kids, on the other hand, often do the opposite. In fact, touch helps them determine what something is. Senses should be frequently engaged to help maximize the natural tendencies of kids to explore. Care should always be taken to ensure the safety of both the children and the environment when engaging them directly with the resources.

Exploring other senses

Making sense of senses

- **Engage at least one sense with every main point.**
- **Promote positive engagements with the resource.** Always explain why it is ***OKAY*** to touch, taste, smell, etc. Kids remember, so be sure you are giving the right lesson.
- **Focus on one sense at a time.** For example, blindfold kids and hand them something. Ask them to identify it, what produced it, or who uses the object. Another example of this is to place scents or an item that smells in a bag and have the kids identify the scent.
- **Change their perspective on a sense.** For example, have them lie on their backs and look at a tree. Have them count the shades of green they can find in the forest, in a square foot of ground, etc.
- **Enjoy yourself.** Many times kids just do not know how to experience the environment. They will learn much from simply watching you.
- **Point things out as you notice them,** especially the small, often overlooked things, or better yet, challenge the kids to notice what is special or unique.

Energetic

Kids are just naturally energetic. They love to play, to run, and are uninhibited. Especially when outside the formal, regimented classroom, kids are likely to want to express themselves through physical activities. An interpreter who constantly reminds children to sit down, listen, stop talking, etc., is missing learning opportunities. Joseph Cornell's (1998) flow learning theory is a wonderful approach to working with kids and helping to positively channel their natural energy. Later in the module, we will review this theory and other techniques for focusing a child's natural excitement and energy.

Developmental level

Another characteristic of children is their level of development. Children develop emotionally, physically, intellectually, and socially through several distinct stages at approximately the same age (Knudson, Cable, and Beck, 1995; Regnier, Gross, and Zimmerman, 1994; Beck and Cable, 2002). These developmental stages can be arrested by physical, emotional, cultural, or social reasons. For example, if a child is malnourished or abused, his/her age-associated level of development may be below the norm. Because developmental levels so clearly impact appropriate content and overall program success, these will be discussed based on age categories. Keep in mind that these categories are generalizations. Use them as guidelines for assisting in the development of curriculum, activities, and structure of programs.

Encouraging kids to explore.

We are all born originals - why is it so many of us die copies?

Edward Young

Level I (Ages 2-6)

Children at this age tend to experience the world through their senses. To them, everything they discover is "alive" and experiences the world the same way they do. For example, 2 to 6 year olds think a tree has feelings and parents, just as they do. Independent play, fantasy, and exploration are the primary ways they discover the world. Language skills also begin to emerge (Piaget, 1964). Symbols and hands-on discovery guide learning. Kids in this stage of development do not typically have the ability to perform logical operations in their minds. The world is what they see, feel, smell, taste, and hear. Socially, 2 to 6 year old kids are self-centered ("egocentric" perspective) (Muess, 1982). They see the world through their own eyes and have a difficult time grasping any other perspective (Grinder and McCoy, 1985, Knudson, Cable, and Beck, 1995, Muess, 1982). Kids in this level also tend to exhibit the preconventional level of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1971). This means they primarily reason the appropriateness of an action based on their perceptions of associated rewards or fears of punishment that directly result from the behavior. This is why stickers, stars, and other methods of rewarding positive behavior work so well at this level of development.

An interpreter helps tiny people enjoy activities on the big stage.

Program tips for 2-6 year olds

- **Make children feel safe with you.**
- **Focus on fantasy, play, and guided discovery.**
- **Establish behavioral expectations early.**
- **Engage children with stories, puppets, games, and sensory explorations.**
- **Keep groups small, or allow kids to participate in activities as individuals.**
- **Conduct short hikes (1/4 mile or less). Kids this age tire easily. Be sensitive to their needs and abilities.**
- **Anthropomorphize (give human characteristics to things that aren't human) to help illuminate difficult concepts.**
- **Shift activities, physical location, focuses, etc., frequently.**

Characteristics

Level 2 (Ages 7-11)

Children at this level of development can deal with simple logical operations and work well in groups or alone. They can classify objects, understand basic relationships, and grasp specific behavioral requests. Children ages approximately seven to eleven are in what Piaget termed the concrete "operational" stage of cognitive development. Although kids at this level are very much wedded to the physical world, they can begin to perform logical operations in their minds. Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy are replaced with endless questions and inquiries about the nature, classification, or relationship of things.

Social and moral stages in this level of development result in children beginning to see the world from a perspective other than their own (Kohlberg, 1971; Muess, 1982). Social development grows from the subjective perspective (ages five to nine) where children begin to understand that others have different perspectives, to the self-reflective thinking (age seven to twelve) category, where they begin to evaluate their own behavior (Muess, 1982; Knudson, Cable and Beck, 1995; Grinder and McCoy, 1985). The world begins to open up to the concept of "others." After preconventional morality, the next stage is conventional, which is marked by an ability to reason actions based on reciprocity. Judgements about rightness of an action are now not based solely on the self, but also the significant others and society as a whole.

7-11 year olds have lots of questions.

Program tips for 7-11 year olds

- **Activities should involve direct experience with the resources.**
- **Kids work successfully in groups or alone.**
- **Questions and inquiries are effective at helping guide discoveries.**
- **Use metaphors, analogies, and other cognitive descriptors to help kids understand difficult concepts.**
- **Behavioral requests and rules can be understandably discussed.**
- **Hikes can be longer (approximately 1/4 - 1/2 mile).**
- **Help them name and categorize items and relationships.**
- **Children become louder and more abrasive in this level of development.**
- **Kids like to "help." They often compete for your attention.**

Level 3 (Ages 12-14)

By age 12, children typically do not like to be called children. Kids in early adolescence can mentally manipulate hypothetical situations and time relationships, and can conduct inductive and deductive logic. They are aware of social norms and expectations and are painfully aware of their own physical appearance.

In this stage of cognitive development, children can think systematically about logical relationships that are not necessarily physically present (Piaget, 1964). Selman categorizes children ages 10-15 in the "mutual-perspective" level of social development (Muess, 1982). Children can now understand something from a neutral third-person perspective or from society as a whole. Discussions of global concepts and ideas now hold meaning.

The main factor influencing success when working with 12-14 year olds is taking into account their primary concern–their physical development. In this stage, they are acutely aware of themselves and everyone else in terms of physical appearance. Not looking stupid or significantly different and being accepted by their peers are their primary concerns and should be yours as well. Be sure activities do not single out anyone to stand up in front of others, perform on their own, or otherwise call direct attention to them. There is safety in numbers.

Program tips for 12-14 year olds

- **Discuss, debate, and allow them to express their own opinions.**
- **Let them take on adult roles.**
- **Engage their minds in "what if" scenarios. Their ability to reason, apply logic, and judge situations should be encouraged.**
- **Provide opportunities for them to guide the discovery, conversation, or direction of the program.**
- **Encourage questions and help them discover the answers (demonstrate how to use field guides, research techniques, etc.).**
- **Encourage them and discuss ways they can continue their involvement (kids' participation in clubs is high at this level of development).**

Explore!

Characteristics

Teens

By the time children have reached the age of 13-14 the techniques reviewed in this module will typically not be very effective. They are too "cool" to play, and the family vacation is boring. Developing programs with their needs in mind is essential. Remember to treat them as if they are adults while understanding they are not. Refer to Module 4-Planning for a review on conducting programs with this "special audience."

Special needs

A variety of factors results in children having visual, mental, mobility, learning, or hearing impairments. These kids, although introducing unique challenges for the interpreter, have the right to be able to attend, with minimal alteration, any programs being offered. *All Visitors Welcome* (1994) recommends that we "focus on what these children *can* do rather than what they cannot, and how you can adapt your program to meet their special needs" (p. 31). *All Visitors Welcome* (1994) and the *Junior Ranger Program Handbook* (1998) both include many helpful pointers for working with visitors with various disabilities. Do not assume you know how to accommodate special needs children. Ask them what they want to do and how you can help them do it. Let them guide you. As always, include several different kinds of stimuli (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) to increase your success.

Non-English speaking children also introduce some interesting challenges. Many of the techniques listed below will assist in working with this special needs group as well. In addition, refer to Module 6-Talks page 6-10 for more tips on working with non-English speaking visitors. Engaging visitors in the resource, using props, and guiding exploration are all useful techniques.

Special needs program tips

- **Find** out about special needs from the teacher in advance.
- **Minimize** obstacles in travel corridors.
- **Allow** the child with a disability to provide input on what is necessary to accommodate him or her.
- **Engage** as many senses as possible.
- **Describe** objects, and if possible, provide opportunities to touch them.
- **Use** clear illustrative descriptions of what you are doing.
- **Face** the audience and speak clearly.
- **Offer** assistance, but do not automatically give it.
- **Be** aware of any special facilities or assistance (listening devices, language interpreters, etc.) available in your park.
- **Do not** "talk down" to a child.
- **Be** respectful, friendly, and open.
- **Do not** give too much special attention to any single child.
- **Be** flexible and adaptable to needs.

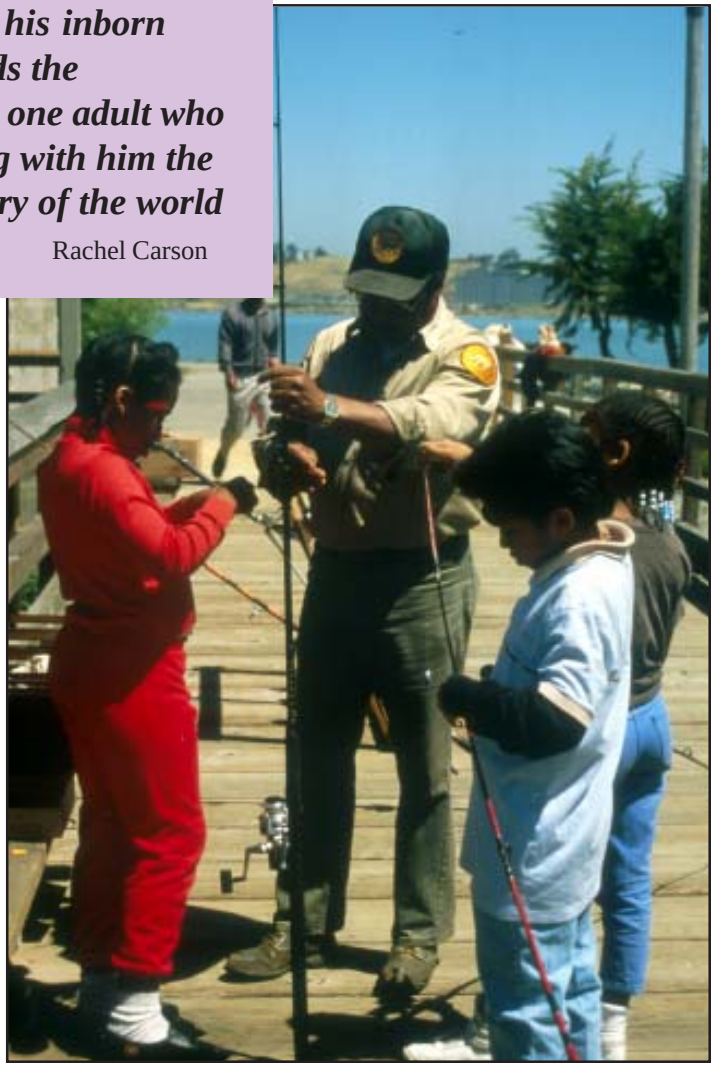
adapted from the Junior Ranger Handbook-CSP

Characteristics

These general characteristics of children are meant to serve as a guide to direct and suggest methods and media to enhance program success. Curiosity, excitement, and the natural desire to experience their surroundings are qualities that help make children's programming so enjoyable for the interpreter. Many adults have forgotten how to experience wonder, awe, and especially how to "play." Use children's programming to help *you* remember. With practice, interpreting to children will help you increase your overall effectiveness as an interpreter. Techniques and strategies that help children discover, grasp, and revel in nature can be very effective when used with adults. Let us turn now to a discussion of the theories, techniques, strategies, and specific skills for working with children.

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder…he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.

Rachel Carson



Befriend individuals and help them learn.

Mechanics

> ***We try to use to the utmost the interest of the child. Interest a child and he thinks. While a child is thinking he is learning.***
>
> Enos Mills

Have fun!

The best technique is to have fun. What *you* love, enjoy, and get excited by, kids will too. Creating a pleasurable experience is much of the battle of interesting a child. "This childish desire to know, to learn, will assure mental development if information be given in a way that appeals. Children can learn but little from cold, unrelated, segregated facts" (Mills, 1920, p. 101). Joseph Cornell (1998) discussed enthusiasm and reminds us that "enthusiasm is contagious, and that…is perhaps your greatest asset as an (interpreter)" (p. 15). Remember what it was like to play, get dirty, and touch the ground? Children will learn more, accept more, and remember more if you play, laugh, and enjoy the experience *with* them. Kids may never have interacted with natural and cultural resources before and will look to you for the cues for how to respond to it. Dive into it!

> ***We must inspire our children to think and live through their hearts, to be guided by the deeper yearnings of life.***
>
> Tom Brown, Jr.

Manage behavior

There is a fine line between allowing children to explore and discover something for themselves and letting them run wild and out of control. The trick is to find that line and walk it like a tightrope. Establish parameters for behavior early, and allow children to expend some of their energy at the start of a program. Specific techniques for controlling behavior vary depending on the developmental level, the group's structure, the environment, distractions, and the presence or absence of other adults.

Manage behavior by putting it "on cue." A behavior cue is when you do or say something and the children have a verbal or physical response that they must give. For example, make your hands into rabbit ears and say "rabbit ears," and the kids have to put their hands on their heads, make rabbit ears, and wiggle their noses. This particular behavior cue might work well during a children's program about animals. Be sure that you make all the children comply with the behavioral cue before you move on to the next topic, activity, etc. You are the leader, but they will exert considerable social pressure on each other to comply. Select or develop specific behavior cues depending on the subject matter, group structure, etc. Ask seasoned interpreters, colleagues, and peers what they use. *Experiment!*

Managing behavior

- **Outline behavioral guidelines (expectations and consequences) at the start of the program.**
- **Put behavior "on cue" early in the program.** Do not let behavior stray too far from expectations or it will be hard to regain control.
- **Be consistent in behavioral requests and enforcements.**
- **Do not yell.** This signifies that you have lost control.
- **Use proximity.** Put a problem child next to you.
- **Disapproving "looks" are powerful tools, but only if you follow through.**
- **Delegate responsibility.** Disruptive children make good "helpers."
- **Enlist others (parents, teachers, volunteers, etc.) to assist.**
- **If the problem persists, discuss it with the child.** As with any visitor, identify the problem behavior, the negative impacts to the resource, to others, and to themselves from the behavior, and address how the situation can be fixed.
- **Give the child time to comply.** Do not expect immediate results.
- **Judge the nature of your behavioral requests.** Is safety of the child or the resource an issue? Is it simply your personal desire for behavior? Is the behavior disruptive to others? Make careful distinctions about what you want and why. Some requests may not be practical, reasonable, or possible. Whenever possible, praise (the good) and ignore (the bad).

Safety first

- **Keep group size small (no more than 15).** This helps you maintain control and protect the children from the actions of themselves or others. If you must work with a larger group, have the teacher take half on a self-guided activity (then switch) or enlist docents to assist you.
- **Establish rules and expectations for behavior with the parents and with the kids.**
- **Know where the parents will be during the program and what the protocol is for dealing with an injury.** Be sure you always have a means of contacting other staff to help in the event of an emergency.
- **Be prepared. Stay current in CPR, first-aid training, etc.**
- **Be sure you ask if there is anything that you should know (allergic to bee stings, etc.).**
- **Frequently check in with the kids; ask them how they are doing.** Many children may never have been in a natural or cultural resource park before, and basic fears can be strong.
- **Talk to children about dangers you may encounter (poison oak, etc.) at the beginning of the program.**

> ***Children are naturally drawn to learning if you can keep the spirit of the occasion happy and enthusiastic.***
>
> Joseph Bharat Cornell

Focus on the environment

Keep children focused on the park and its features. Point out things. Help them become aware of colors, textures, shapes, and differences between things. Teach them how to observe by being a good observer yourself and sharing what you see. Children want to explore the world through their senses–capitalize on this natural desire. "We must take the initiative to enhance children's sensory awareness, building on their natural gifts" (Brown, 1989, p. 8). Programs will be successful if they help children to see, feel, smell, etc., the world around them. Even if programs occur in the classroom, help children become aware of the world and their perceptions of it. Highlight the subtle elements of the world around them. Engage their minds and bodies in the environment. Use questions to encourage them to think about what they perceive.

Help kids explore the environment.

> ***We should set an example, by pointing out subtle sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and feelings. Only through our careful attention and nurturing will children ever hope to reach their full sensory potential. Keen sensory awareness is one of the most important skills children can have in life, and it is sensory awareness that makes life full and rich.***
>
> Tom Brown, Jr.

Name names

Children have an enormous capacity for learning new information. Convey facts, names, dates, and details to children. Stories, analogies, metaphors, etc., are important, but kids also want to know the specifics. Do not stray too far from the planned path, but answer their questions. Better yet, do as Tom Brown, Jr., recommends and "point (them) in the direction of the answer, or ask a series of questions, all designed to make (them) think" (p. xi). Children are developing; use your programs to help them increase their understanding, knowledge, and vocabulary of the natural and cultural world (Lewis, 1980).

Getting on kids' level helps them learn.

> ***Every normal child is as avaricious for information as a miser is for gold. This childish desire to know, to learn, will assure mental development if information (is) given in a way that appeals.***
>
> Enos Mills

On the level

Children spend much of their lives being talked down to, mentally and physically. Most of the time you are a uniformed stranger to these children. Whenever possible, physically get on their level; you can be intimidating towering over them. Bend down when showing them something or when talking directly to them. Kids are much more receptive to an adult who gets on their level to talk with them. In addition to the appropriate physical level, let the California academic content standards guide your selection of appropriate material. The academic standards provide very specific guidelines for the information children are expected to know at various grades.

Keep it short

As we learned in Module 3-Communication adults have short attention spans. However, they are capable of making themselves focus for longer periods of time. Children, on the other hand, are more natural in their responses to things. If they are bored, they will let you know! Fidgeting, talking, moving around, and generally not paying attention are all classic signals indicating you have lost their interest. Attention spans are very short for kids and "most of them have not learned to be politely quiet when the span is exceeded" (Lewis, 1980, p. 126). Depending on the developmental level, attention spans may range from a few seconds to about 10 minutes. Programs can and should be conducted for longer periods of time than this, but to be successful they need to shift focus, location, subject matter, and activity more frequently than programs for adults. For example, one great technique to use when working with kids is to move their physical location frequently. Having them stand up, sit down, face the other way, etc., is effective in regaining interest and focus. They need to move; use it to your advantage.

The most successful programs keep children physically *and* mentally engaged. Keep information in "sound bites." Children cannot listen for extended periods of time. Weave information with activities and games to gain a child's interest. Anything done in excess gets tiresome; keep it short.

Flow learning

One wonderful system for successfully conducting programs with children is called "flow learning." This approach to working with children was developed by Joseph Cornell. He has published several books that provide activities following these principles. Flow learning takes advantage of the natural process of learning something new. Cornell created flow learning from four distinct stages that mirror the natural process of learning. Stage 1 is awaken enthusiasm; Stage 2 is called focus attention; Stage 3 is direct experience; and Stage 4 is share inspiration. Each of the four stages has accompanying activities that help maximize that particular stage of learning.

Stage 1 of flow learning–"awaken enthusiasm"–takes place when children are first exposed to something new. Enthusiasm and limitless energy mark this stage of learning. Kids with a new toy or an adult discovering a new hobby come readily to mind. In a park setting, kids often come to interpretive programs in a Stage 1 mindset. They are enthusiastic and have boundless energy. Sitting them down and trying to teach them anything would be difficult at best. Instead, Cornell recommends beginning the program with activities that "establish a mood of cooperation and fun" (Cornell, 1989, p. 31). The first activities set the tone for the rest of the program. After an introduction, as outlined in previous modules, select an activity that involves the children physically with the resource. Stage 1 activities, although fun, enjoyable, and playful, are not simply games. They are opportunities that engage children physically and mentally in the resource. *Bat and Moth*, *What Animal Am I?* and *Owls and Crows* are wonderful examples of popular Stage 1 activities. These and other activities can be found in Cornell's books on *Sharing Nature with Children* (1979, 1989, and 1998). Stage 1 allows kids to expend energy and prepares them to slow down and focus attention. Then they can begin to truly experience the natural and cultural environment.

Stage 2 –"focus attention"–begins after the initial enthusiasm is channeled. If kids are too excited and enthusiastic, they cannot pay attention, watch, see, or feel anything. Stage 2 activities allow children to

begin to focus on one or more of their senses. This careful sensory experience sets the framework for more meaningful direct interactions. *The Unnature Trail, Scavenger Hunt,* and the *Micro-Hike* are activities that all work well to slow down and focus children's attention.

Stage 3–"direct experience"–takes advantage of focused attention and provides opportunities for children to have meaningful direct experiences. These activities, although closely related to Stage 2 activities, provide a more personal, intimate experience with nature. This stage of flow learning is where inspiration, self-actualization, and peak experiences can occur. Where Stage 2 attempts to awaken the five senses, Stage 3 "awakens a sense of wonder" (Cornell, 1989, p. 39). *Blind Trail, Sounds,* and *Colors* are very effective activities at providing children intimate direct experiences.

After experiencing the excitement and enjoyment of a new experience, it is natural to want to share that experience with others. Stage 4–"share inspiration"–takes advantage of this natural desire to share with others that which excites and inspires us. Children ages 7-14 are especially receptive to sharing with and teaching others. Communicating the experience can come in the form of stories, pictures, poems, etc. Cornell's activities in Stage 4, as with the other stages, are numerous and varied. This allows the interpreter to select a specific activity based on the target audience, the time frame, and the subject matter. For example, *Recipe for a Forest* gives children an opportunity to share what they know about ecology, forests, and ecosystems. This works well with older children in Level 2 or 3 development. *Living History*, on the other hand, provides the framework for sharing stories of the people, places, and events in our history. This activity works well with children of any age, but especially with young children. Stage 4 activities can also be used as a form of assessment to understand what the children gained from your program.

Although the activities are used most successfully in sequence, they can also be used to supplement existing children's programs, as icebreaker activities, or as stand-alone activities serving as a means to an end. The applicability of Cornell's (1989) flow learning activities is enormous. In addition, activities can be adapted nicely to fit with any subject matter and can be modified to work effectively with adults.

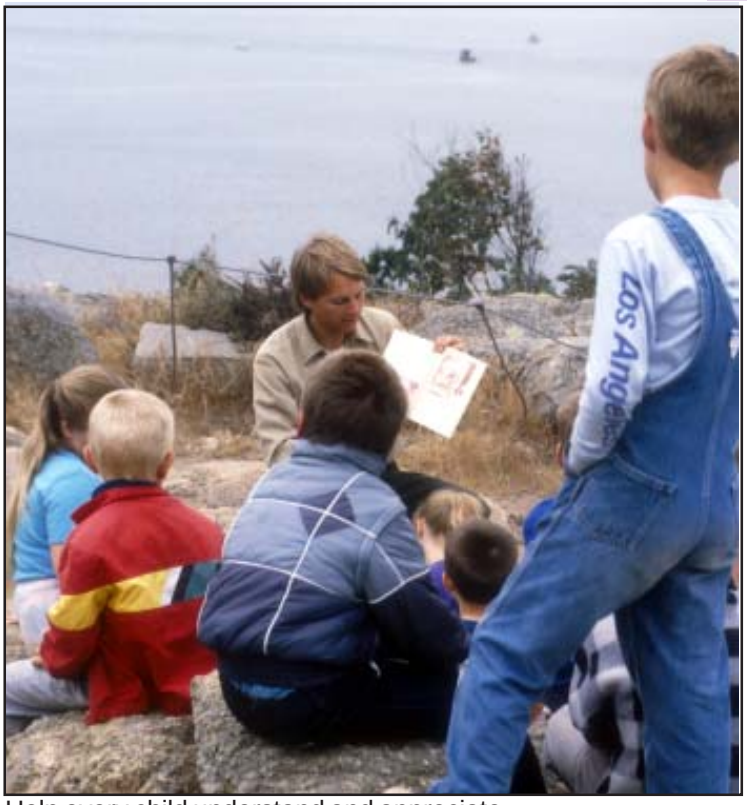
Other resources

There are numerous other resources available for designing programs for children. *Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, Project Wild Aquatic*, and *Project Wet* provide guidelines, curriculum, activities, and learning opportunities designed to encourage children to think. Courses on how to use these resources are offered throughout the state and are available to everyone. Seek out these opportunities and others to improve your skills and techniques for working with children. In addition, there are numerous other resource books, websites, and curriculum guides that can help you develop your interpretive programs. Some may have been developed specifically for your park. Skills and strategies for working with children come with time, experience, and practice. Talk to your colleagues, peers, and supervisors about their experiences. Seek out opportunities, volunteer at schools or clubs, etc., to gain experience working with children.

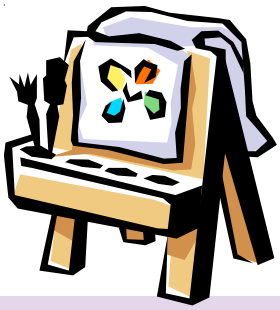
There is no formula or guide for working with children that can replace your own natural enthusiasm, creativity, and passion. There is no substitute for you. Your love of the subject and of your audience is the greatest asset you have. Working with children presents wonderful opportunities to share your

inspiration, knowledge, and understanding of natural and cultural resources. By engaging them and their families, you are developing park stewards who will share your desire to preserve and protect our heritage.

> ***Adults are obsolete children.***
>
> Dr. Seuss



Help every child understand and appreciate.



> ***Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.***
>
> Pablo Picasso

What's ahead

Now that we have reviewed many of the basic types of formal interpretive programs, let us turn to the most common type of informal interpretation in the parks–roving interpretation. It involves taking our techniques, skills, and interpretive messages to the visitors–on the trails, in the visitor centers, in the campgrounds, or wherever they might be. The next module will provide guidelines for conducting successful roving interpretation.

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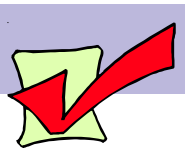
Kids!

Self assessment



Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in Module 9-Kids! The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read Module 9-Kids! Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

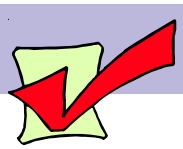
1) Name two reasons why children may be connecting with nature or the cultural past.

2) List two benefits of conducting interpretive programs with children.

3) A program for children is basically a simpler version of the adult program. (Explain your answer.)
   a) True
   b) False

4) Name three special children's programs conducted statewide in California State Parks.

5) Which of the following are common characteristics of children relevant to creating programs? (Circle all that apply.)
   a) Naturally curious
   b) Energetic
   c) Short attention spans
   d) Don't like a lot of facts



Self assessment

6) Programs conducted with formal school groups should be based on (Circle all that apply.)
   a) School curriculum
   b) Content standards
   c) Park themes
   d) Interpreter interest

7) For 2 to 6 year old children, programs should (Circle all that apply.)
   a) Use stories and games
   b) Shift activities
   c) Focus on fantasy
   d) Go for long hikes

8) Programs conducted with children 7 to 11 years old should (Circle all that apply.)
   a) Involve questions and inquiries
   b) Be detailed and thorough
   c) Include written exercises
   d) Practice guided discovery

9) Programs for children 12 to 14 years old should (Circle all that apply.)
   a) Involve debates and discussions
   b) Allow them to guide the discovery
   c) Promote individual performances in front of the group
   d) Encourage self-directed exploration

10) Name three techniques for including a child with mobility impairments in your program.

11) You should not get down on the physical level of the kids during a talk. (Explain your answer.)
   a) True
   b) False

Self assessment

12) What does it mean to "put behavior on cue?"

13) When leading kids on a hike, list three ways to ensure the safety of your group.

14) You should not give children a lot of facts, names, and dates. (Explain your answer.)
    a) True
    b) False

15) What is flow learning?

16) Describe two ways to manage disruptive behavior during a children's program.

Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in Module 9-Kids! to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.

Workbook learning activities

To help you review and apply the material covered in Module 9-Kids!, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

1) How would you explain or describe the following to a group of seven-year-old children?

Tides

The water cycle

The tribe is extinct.

The statue represents history.

They should not pick the endangered flowers.

Time is relative.

The seasons

2) Develop an activity for 12 year olds to educate them about the importance of cultural diversity.

3) You are conducting a program with a group of 14 year old children. One of them has been continuously disrupting the program. You have tried making him your helper, keeping him next to you, and asking him to stop. You have another hour of the program. What can you do to manage the situation?

Take it to your park

Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use the answers as a guide for beginning your career in California State Parks.

Kids!

Park name_____

1) What types of children's programs are conducted in your park? For what ages?

1a) If Junior Ranger, Junior Lifeguard, and/or Litter Ge tter programs are not offered, why not? If yes, how successful are they?

2) What schools near your park visit the park routinely? Which schools do not visit? Why not?

3) Has there been an outreach effort by your park staff to provide programs in the classroom? To what extent and how successful was it?

4) Design a children's program to be conducted with children ages 11 to 14 in your park. Brainstorm, create the theme, outline the program, create activities, etc. What is the objective of the program? How does it meet or address a management goal? What visual aids, props, audiovisual equipment, and supplies will you need?